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Watson's Art Journal,

A WEEKLY RECORD OF MUSIC, ART AND LITERATURE.

HENRY C. WATSON, EDITOR.

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MAX MARETZEK.....DIRECTOR.

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OPENING NIGHT FOR THE SEASON.
MONDAY EVENING, SEPT. 23, 1867.

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DON GIOVANNI,

MME. PAREPA ROSA,

A. M. HAUCK, A. RONCONI,
BELLINI, BARAGLI.

TUESDAY EVENING, SEPT. 24, at 8.

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SIGRA. ANGELA PERALTA,

BELLINI, ANTONUCCI,

ANASTASI, etc.

(His first appearance this season.)

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DONIZETTI:

HIS LIFE AND WORKS.

BY M. DE THÉMINES.

Translated for the ART JOURNAL from the French,

BY MARGARET CECILIA CLEVELAND.

VII.

The success of *La Zingara* decided the future
of Donizetti. The orders of the *impresarii* poured in from all quarters. He accordingly wrote *La Lettera anonima*, for *Il Fondo*, one of the royal theatres of Naples, and *Chiura e Serafina*, for *La Scala*, Milan. Tamburini sang the baryton's rôle, but this opera only met with a feeble success.

From Milan he returned to Naples, and wrote during the year 1823, four operas: *Il Fortunato inganno*, and *Aristea*, for Naples; *Una Follia*, for Venice, and a grand opera for the San Carlo, under the title of *Alfredo il Grande*.

This last work, if it did not fail completely, did little to increase the reputation of the author. It was evident that he wrote too rapidly, and already his enemies took advantage of that fact to impose upon the young composer. But Donizetti was not slow in taking his revenge. He wrote a veritable opera bouffe: *l'Ajo nell'imbarazzi*, and brought it out in Rome with the greatest success. Then, as it was in Naples that he failed with *Alfredo*, it was there that he wished to triumph,—I should say reinstate himself. He therefore immediately gave his

new work in that city. The success it met with was in every respect equal to that of Rome.

At length, as if he had not sufficiently vindicated his genius, he composed, also for Naples, *Emilia di Liverpool*, a composition which triumphed equally.

In 1826 Donizetti wrote *Alahor di Granata* and *Il lastello degl' Invalidi*, for Palermo. The first of these two operas was loudly applauded; the other met with only a moderate success. Then he returned to Naples and gave an opera in one act, entitled *Elvira*. These operas are now forgotten; but look the scores over again, and here and there will be seen the impression of the lion's claw.

The life of a composer at that time, in Italy, was not a very happy one. The applause they received did not suffice for the material life; the banker did not recognize it, neither were the landlord or business men paid with that kind of money. Thus Donizetti was obliged to sell himself.

Let us explain this word.

There was at that period in Naples the king of *impresarii*. I have named Barbaia. He was a subtle fellow, who perceived in Donizetti a rich vein to work; he monopolized it, by making him sign a contract, in virtue of which Donizetti engaged himself to compose for him a fixed number of operas during a certain number of years; Barbaia gave him,—a year.

I do not dare to mention this sum. It would wrong the memory of Donizetti; but I will say what they gave him during two years for directing the Théâtre Nuovo.

They paid him fifty ducats a month—a little more than 200 francs! What rich appointments for the director of a theatre,—above all when that director was a renowned composer!

It was thus that he wrote *Olivio e Pasquale*, for the carnival of 1827, at Rome; *il Borgomastro di Saardam*, at Naples; *Le Convenzione teatrali*, a capital farce which has amused entire Italy for more than twenty years; and finally, *Gli Esiliati in Siberia*. The success of this last opera was immense.

Donizetti found the time, notwithstanding his theatrical engagements, to pursue some healthful literary studies. The reading of the *Divina Comedia* suggested to him the idea of setting to music the song of Count Ugolino, that sombre and poignant revelation of which the *Tour de la Faim*, at Pisa, has not entirely guarded the secret.

In this it was no longer a question of easy melodies, of cavatinas and *cablettes*; it was necessary to clothe with music the vigorous and cutting lines of the proud Ghibelline;

music mingled with tears and cries of anger, to depict the despair of a father who sees his sons and nephews fall one after another, imploring succor, craving food, and dying from inanition.

The task was difficult, but Donizetti did not relinquish it, and made a composition worthy of Dante's imperishable epic.

Encouraged by this success, he sought and found in the *Divina Comedia*, a companion to his first essay: the sorrowful avowals of Francesca da Rimini. The master entered into this subject with passion; and it appears that this time also success crowned his noble efforts.

The year 1828, with the two following years, was without doubt the most fertile period of this fertile musician. This period was initiated and concluded by two veritable *chefs d'oeuvres*: *L'Esule di Roma*, and *Anna Bolena*.

Here is the list of scores written between those two:

La Regina di Galconde, for the Teatro Carlo Felice, of Genoa.

Gianni di Calais, for Il Fondo, Naples.

Giovedi grasso, for the same theatre, all three composed in 1828, without counting the *Esule di Roma*.

In 1829 we find two grand operas: *Il Paria*, written for the San Carlo, Naples, and *Il Castello di Kenilworth*, for the same theatre.

In 1830, *Il Diluvio universale*, opera oratorio, for San Car'o.

I pazzi per progetto, for Il Fondo, of the same city.

Francesca di Foix, for the San Carlo.

Ismelda dei Lambertinzi.

La Romaniera, for Il Fondo.

It must be admitted that the Neapolitans were passionately fond of their new maestro, for they did not weary of hearing nine new operas of the same composer in rapid succession.

We ought to add that in the year 1830, Donizetti sketched his *Anna Bolena*, which was represented at the Teatro Carcano, during the carnival season of 1830-31.

It was the Austerlitz of the young conqueror.

THE HEREFORD FESTIVAL.

MALVERN, Aug. 24.

OTTO GOLDSCHMIDT'S NEW SACRED CANTANTA.—In my last communication from Hereford I said that such a work as Herr Goldschmidt's *Ruth* demanded a deliberate judgment. A deliberate judgment I am now about to give it. Circumstances are favorable to this. The bustle and excitement of the festival, and of Hereford in the festival week, are over. The town itself lies far away over the tops of the grand old hills, under the shadow of which I write. All nature—and a good deal of nature can be seen from this spot—is basking lazily in the summer sunshine, there is stillness over everything, and even the balmy Malvern zephyrs, usually so active, do no more than languidly stir the flag which Admiral Wink of the North hoists at the main of his comfortable craft. At such a time, and in such a place, the reflective faculties get the upper hand, and one is given to look at men and things with a judicial impartiality, because removed for a while from contact with disturbing influences, unless, indeed, Champagne count among them. Here it is easy to understand why, of old

time, judgment seats were erected on the tops of the hills, and why Jove (who drank nectar, which, poets say, is better than Champagne) located on the Olympian heights. But I must stop this line of disquisition, or I shall be reminded of the Saturday Reviewer who remarked that "no sooner does one of these gentlemen (special correspondents) find himself on an eminence than he begins to emit an avalanche of metaphorical bombast." To the matter in hand, therefore, and at once.

Nobody censures, or even pities, him who suffers from "the last infirmity of noble minds." Rather does such an one, in every effort to gratify his ambition, receive the encouragement and applause of his fellows. There is something in the sight of a man addressing himself to a great and difficult adventure which calls forth our instinctive admiration. But there are, also, some adventures which we insist shall not be undertaken without qualifications awarded only to a few. In the knightly days, he who would do the deeds of knighthood was first required to show himself worthy. Those days are gone, but their spirit remains; and when a man, only in his novitiate as an esquire, rides into the ring wearing golden spurs, we send our heralds to tell him he has made a mistake, and bid him begone. If a youthful bard indite sonnets "to his mistress' eyebrow," we can tolerate his mediocrity, but if he attempt an epic poem without sufficient means, we flagellate him as a warning not to do it again.

So, too, if a musician make a modest appearance as a composer, we bid him "Go speed;" but when he comes before us with an oratorio which, weighed in the balance, is found wanting, he neither deserves nor receives any mercy. The composition of an oratorio is one of the things demanding first and foremost a careful overhauling of resources. If he who would undertake it can find within himself profound technical knowledge, lofty artistic feeling, great power of invention, and that kind of mental vision which, not only sees the whole, but the relation to it of each part, then by all means let him set about the task. But let him examine himself carefully, since it depends upon the accuracy of his conclusion whether or not he is to be adjudged guilty of an impudent assumption. A mistake on this point altogether fails of excuse. Something depends, however, on the nature of the subject selected.

For a man to attempt the illustration of the passion and suffering of the Messiah, or the tremendous plagues of Egypt, or the varied and stirring incidents in the life of Elijah is a different thing from essaying the same office for the simple story of Ruth, the Moabitess. So far Herr Goldschmidt has shown himself modest. He might have addressed himself to the opening of the Seven Seals, or the Deluge, or to the Fall of Man, while he was about it. In that he did not, he must be accredited with having gauged his powers to a certain degree. The pity of it is that he attempted an oratorio at all. Before he set pen to paper nobody thought him equal to such a task, and nobody blamed him for the want of power. Now, the incapacity is proved, and with it another incapacity having relation to self-knowledge, which is not so much a misfortune as a fault.

To make matters worse for Herr Goldschmidt, the subject he selected is not only easy of treatment compared with most others, but adapted to call out what latent power a

composer may possess. Its sweet simplicity, its perfect naturalness, and the touching pathos of many of its situations, stir up no ordinary sympathy, so that he who reads it must needs realize every incident it contains. We all know the marvellous effect this has in facilitating illustration or description; to say nothing of the zest which it enables the illustrator or describer to bring to his work. Looking at it thus, it is hard to see how a musical setting of so beautiful a story could fail utterly, unless such a failure were sedulously courted. One would imagine that a composer has only to open his heart and mind to its influences, and to write down the thoughts it spontaneously inspires, in order to be, if not profoundly learned, at least simple, natural, and pleasing. Nobody supposes for a moment that Herr Goldschmidt courted failure, or that in writing his work he did not labor with zeal and conscientiousness. He has shown us, however, that besides being unable to rise to the height of oratorio, he is, through some singular defect of organization, insensible to things which would help him on his upward path. Some composers fail because of their subject; Herr Goldschmidt has failed in spite of his. In either case the result is the same, but—with a difference.

Looking over the new oratorio (or "Sacred Pastoral," if the composer like it better) one is first impressed with the singularity of its construction. *Ruth* resembles nothing more than a piece of mosaic, or rather a Dutch chimney piece, in which each tile tells a different story, and has no connection with its neighbors except that of proximity. The same patchy and fragmentary character is found in the libretto, which is divided into a succession of short "fyttes," headed "At Bethlehem," "In the Harvest Field," "At the Threshing Floor," &c. In this case, however, there is a necessity for such a defect, which would have suggested to a judicious composer the desirableness of providing a remedy, as far as possible, by the more symmetrical construction of his music. Instead of doing so, its influence upon Herr Goldschmidt has been in the opposite direction, and the whole work is a mass of undeveloped and unconnected thoughts, which fall upon the ear much like the snatches of conversation of the passers-by in a crowded street. Now, it is a simple question like that of Naomi, "Who art thou, my daughter?" then a tedious orchestral passage not "germane to the issue" in the slightest degree, and next comes the answer, almost every sentence of which is marked by an interlude after the almost exploded fashion of church psalmody. How inexpressibly wearisome this soon becomes no one needs to be told; nor is it necessary to point out how fatal to success was the inability even to sketch the outlines of an oratorio of which it is the sign and result.

Out of the twenty-eight "numbers" in the work, ten are recitations, many of them very long. The composer's treatment of these recitations becomes, therefore, an important matter, having a formidable influence upon the character of the whole. It is to be regretted that he did not adhere to the "ancient lines" so well marked out by the masters of his art, who, except in rare instances, were content to provide the simplest means for the musical declamation of narrative. Only such are called for by the necessity of the case. Recitative in oratorio is but the thread that connects the various parts together, and